



DENISE MERRILL

SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT

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- PRESS RELEASE -

MERRILL UNVEILS ELECTION REFORM AGENDA, CALLS FOR INFORMATION SHARING AND EARLY VOTING

SECRETARY OF THE STATE PROPOSES MORE OVERSIGHT OF ELECTION
PREPAREDNESS, AMENDMENT TO THE CT CONSTITUTION TO MOVE TOWARDS EARLY
VOTING

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Denise Merrill today unveiled four distinct pieces of legislation that form the cornerstone of efforts to improve and reform Connecticut's election system. Merrill is proposing to strengthen the integrity of Connecticut's elections by requiring more communication between local Registrars of Voters, charged with the responsibility of running all elections, and the Secretary of the State's office. Under the proposed legislation, every municipality in the state would be required to report to the Secretary of the State's office how many ballots they purchase for upcoming elections, and certify that they have taken into account factors such as tight races that may augment voter turnout. In rare cases the Secretary would be authorized to direct a municipality to order more ballots if an insufficient number was purchased. Every town would also be required to have an emergency plan to address issues such as power outages and ballot shortages on Election Day. Secretary Merrill is also proposing lawmakers pass an amendment to the Connecticut Constitution that would open the door to early voting options such as "no-excuse" absentee ballots or regional early voting centers.

"What I am proposing here are targeted, common-sense changes that I believe will in the short term improve the way our elections are run and in the long term lead to making voting easier and more convenient," said Secretary Merrill, Connecticut's chief elections official. "For centuries, elections in Connecticut have been run entirely at the local level. While that has served our state well, it is also clear that all of us involved in the elections process need more information and oversight. The bottom line is that no registered voter who wants to cast a ballot on Election Day should ever be turned away from the polls. I also think it is time for Connecticut to make it easier for voters in our fast-paced and mobile society to vote before Election Day. If states like North Carolina and Oregon can do it, so can we in Connecticut."

Following a morning press conference to review the legislation, Secretary Merrill then testified in support of the bills at a hearing in front of the General Assembly's Government Administration and Elections committee, chaired by State Senator Gayle Slossberg (D-Orange) and State Representative Russ Morin (D-Wethersfield). To show the non-partisan nature of these reform proposals, both GAE committee chairs as well as State Representative Tony Hwang (R-Fairfield), Ranking member of the GAE committee joined Secretary Merrill at the press conference, as did Urania Petit, the Working Families party Registrar of Voters in Hartford.

Representative Hwang said, "I support these initiatives because fundamental to our democratic process is the guarantee of an election that is honest, transparent and reflects the true intention of the voters. We as legislators look forward to working with Secretary of the State Merrill to ensure that the integrity of electoral process is beyond reproach. We should explore options to create more flexible voting options such as "no-excuse" absentee ballots and utilizing technological innovations to help more constituents to engage in the prized right to vote."

Bridgeport Mayor Bill Finch, who also supports the reforms, said, "Greater centralization and oversight by the Secretary of the State to ensure well-run and orderly elections is welcome by our community. We fully support Sec. of State Denise Merrill in this meaningful legislative reform."

The four pieces of legislation proposed today by Secretary Merrill are:

Raised Bill 942 "An Act Concerning the Integrity of Elections"

- Requires municipalities to adopt emergency contingency plans for Election Day
- Requires municipalities to report to Secretary of the State's office the number of ballots ordered for each upcoming election, based on a review of prior turnout and other factors
- Secretary of the State's Office would be allowed to direct municipalities to order more ballots if in sufficient number purchased for an Election.
- Municipalities that fail to report to the Secretary of the State's Office would be required to order ballots for 100% of registered voters.
- Improved and enhanced training of moderators at the polls.
- Cities/Towns report lists of polling places and moderators to Secretary of the State before each election.
- Secretary of the State Authorized to enter polling locations on Election Day, remove a moderator with cause.

House Joint Resolution 88 – Constitutional Amendment

- Amendment to the Connecticut Constitution to remove restrictions on voting by absentee ballot.
- Amendment would grant Connecticut General Assembly the power to enact either "No-Excuse" Absentee balloting or other forms of early voting such as regional voting centers.
- If approved by two-thirds majority of the General Assembly, Amendment could be ratified by voters in November of 2012

Raised Bill 938 “An Act Concerning Technical and Minor Changes to Elections”/ Raised Bill 6330 “An Act Concerning Certain Revisions to Election Related Statutes”

- Removes all references in Connecticut state laws to lever voting machines, that have not been used since 2006
- Makes needed technical changes to CT election laws to bring laws up to date with the use of optical scan technology